



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Craig Thomas

Will defend his prospectus

Naturalizing Sustainability: Thoreau, Leopold, Carson, Wilson

The contemporary sustainability paradigm aims to achieve a balance among three pillars - economics, environment and social equity - as set forth in the *Brundtland Report* (1987) over 25 years ago. These pillars remain only vaguely defined, and many sustainability scholars agree that the emphasis in sustainability planning and practice is on economic values, while environmental values are poorly represented and are often framed exclusively in anthropocentric terms as “natural capital” or “ecosystem services.” Thus while we laud economic principles (e.g. efficiency, trade-off negotiating, triple-payoffs and local economies), environmental and social strategies that are odds with economic growth (e.g. reduced consumption or ecological limits) are not given serious consideration. This paradigm has thus also failed to resolve historical Arcadian vs. imperialist, preservationist vs. conservationist, and environmentalist vs. economist tensions.

How can we understand sustainability more holistically? What would the classical American naturalists have to say about today’s dominant sustainability paradigm? I propose that the writings of Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), Rachel Carson (1907-1964), and Edward O. Wilson (1927-) express philosophical principles that capture a range of normative, economic, ecological, and social values to enhance the sustainability discourse. I will analyze the salient literature and criticism in both the naturalist and sustainability canons to identify the incongruence between naturalist principles and those of the current sustainability paradigm. I will then investigate sustainability paradigms, and competencies taught by faculty, at four graduate sustainability programs in the US to test their congruency with naturalist principles. The results of this study will help exclude certain trade-offs in complex systems, as well as help identify certain systemic qualities should be reinforced. It may also help to further synthesize the broad range of ideas, values, and principles with which sustainability science is concerned.

Tuesday, April 30th, 2013
1:00 PM
Wrigley Hall, Room 401

Faculty, students, and the general public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Ben Minter, Chair
Dr. Christopher Boone, Member
Dr. Paul Hirt, Member
Dr. David Pijawka, Member